

GROWING GARDENERS

GARDEN NEWSLETTER FOR MEDICINE HAT & AREA - APRIL 2023

WELCOME GARDENERS!

BY GENEVIEVE (CFCA GARDEN PROGRAM COORDINATOR)

We are excited to share with you the first issue of the Growing Gardeners Newsletter produced by Community Food Connections Association. This monthly publication aims to provide helpful information for gardeners of all skills levels in Medicine Hat throughout the growing season. This is a pretty special part of the world that we live and grow in but we also face some unique challenges in keeping our plants happy and productive. Whether you're new to growing or a master gardener, the best part of gardening is that there is always room for improvement and for learning new ways to grow. Each month we will share timely advice, best practices for dealing with common pests and weeds, local garden-related events, learning opportunities, and more. We want this to be a community-driven newsletter, so if there is something you'd like to see in the newsletter, please do not hesitate to reach out by email to cfcagarden@gmail.com.
Let the growing begin!

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Mark Your Calendars!

We are partnering with the Medicine Hat Public Library to host our annual seed exchange on **April 23rd from 2-4 pm**. This free event will include garden presentations, displays from local organizations, draw prizes, seed sharing and more.

For additional details and schedule, follow us on social media. If you are interested in volunteering to help make this event a sprouting success, email cfcagarden@gmail.com to sign up.



COMMUNITY GARDEN MEMBER ORIENTATION

APRIL 23RD FROM 1:10 - 2 PM
HONOR CURRIE ROOM AT THE LIBRARY

If you are a member of the Sheldon Miller or Kipling Community Garden, please join us for our annual orientation meeting. After the meet-up, gardeners can stick around for our Seedy Sunday annual seed exchange from 2-4pm. There will be presentations on garden-related topics, displays for local groups, draw prizes, and more!



GARDENING IN COMMUNITY - A Way with Weeds

What is it about gardening that drives us to plant and weed and toil and harvest year after year? It might be the juicy tomatoes, flowers to cut for a bouquet, or just something to keep our hands and minds busy. But for many, gardening is an act of hope and a desire for connection. Every seed planted takes us a step closer to a bountiful future, both for the plants and for ourselves. The most successful gardeners are those who are patient and observant throughout the season, those who let their curiosity take the reigns. These skills can serve us even outside of the garden patch as we grow and live together as a community.

While plant identification can seem overwhelming, like many skills, practice makes perfect. Flowers are one of the key parts used for plant ID, but looking at leaves, stems and roots can give enough information to know what we are seeing. Weed ID guides, like the one below, describe these parts and usually include pictures as well. Once we have identified the weed, we can start making a plan to deal with it without harming our favorite plants, or the life in our soil and garden spaces. Some important questions include: What is the life cycle of this weed (annual = one life cycle/year, biennial = one life cycle/2 years, perennial = lives more than 2 year)? Can it only spread by seeds or does it also spread underground? Let curiosity be our guide as we take a closer look at one common weed here in Medicine Hat, Creeping Bellflower.

WEED OF THE MONTH

CREeping BELLFLOWER

Campanula rapunculoides Provincial Designation Noxious



Creeping Bellflower is a member of the Boraginaceae (Borage) family, it was introduced as an ornamental from Europe, other names include Creeping Campanula or Creeping Bluebell.

CONCERN Aggressive root system, forming dense colonies can be extremely difficult to control.

SIMILAR SPECIES Native bluebells.

LIFE CYCLE Creeping perennial.

CONTROL Long term management, hand pull before seed set (although its difficult to get the entire root), resistant to some herbicides, mowing will not kill this plant, but will prevent flowering.

IDENTIFICATION

FLOWER Purple, bell shaped, 5 lobes, 5 green sepals, nodding.

LEAVES Alternately arranged on the stem, heart shaped with jagged edges (variable), lower leaves have longer stems (petiole), upper leaves have little to no stem.

STEMS No branching, hairy, 20- 100cm tall.

ROOT Thick creeping rhizomes make this plant very aggressive and difficult to control.

SEED/FRUIT One plant can produce thousands of seeds per year, seeds are small and light brown, 10 year viability.

If you are familiar with Creeping Bellflower (CB), you know how troublesome it can be. Unlike most annual garden weeds, CB is a perennial. The top will die back over winter but the roots survive. This weed produces thousands of seeds each year, which is bad enough. But CB also spreads through rhizomes (underground plant stems) that can grow into new plants by sprouting roots and stems.

Should we tackle this weed by rototilling? Certainly not. This would worsen the problem by cutting up the rhizomes and creating hundreds of new plants. We want to prevent the plant from spreading more seeds by cutting or mowing above ground before the plant goes to seed. Hand pulling can work for a few weeds but large patches should be smothered with cardboard/plastic/tarp for the season. Keep monitoring the area for new growth. Since CB spreads so easily, working with our neighbors is key to success. When we share what we know, we can all grow.

"GARDENING IS THE GREATEST TONIC AND THERAPY A HUMAN BEING CAN HAVE. EVEN IF YOU HAVE ONLY A TINY PIECE OF EARTH, YOU CAN CREATE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL, WHICH WE ALL HAVE A GREAT NEED FOR. IF WE BEGIN BY RESPECTING PLANTS, IT'S INEVITABLE WE'LL RESPECT PEOPLE."

AUDREY HEPBURN

Looking for more great garden resources, like local planting charts? Check out this page: resilientsoutheasternalberta.com/ca-seed-library/



Source: Wheatland County. (2017). Identification Guide for Alberta Invasive Plants. https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=pdf/weed_identification_book.pdf



PLANNING TO PLANT



While summer may still feel far away, the time is right for making plans for our gardens. It can be helpful to look back at last year's garden both to prevent problems in the coming year and to learn from last year's mistakes. Garden planning doesn't have to be complicated (unless we want it to be!) and can help us to get more out of our gardens each season. We wanted to share some considerations that are helpful to keep in mind.

Timing: Having a plan for when to start seeds, transplant times, and succession planting (staggered planting to spread out the harvest) is a great way to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Seed packets can provide helpful information like when to start seeds and days to maturity. Check out the right column for seeds to start indoors now so that they are ready to plant out after the last frost (usually around May 18th). We love local planting charts like the Vegetable Planting Chart for the Southern Prairies from West Coast Seeds that list best times for starting seeds indoors and out.

Position and Spacing: As a general rule, vegetables that produce a fruit (like tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, peppers) need more sun and take longer to produce. Leafy crops (like kale, lettuce and spinach) tend to bolt when they get too much heat and can be planted in the shadier parts of our gardens. Seed packets usually indicate how far to space plants to accommodate their size at maturity. Some people like to draw a map of the garden each year and pencil in where everything will be growing. There are also apps to help with garden planning!

Pests and Diseases: When we grow the same thing in the same spot year after year, pest insects and diseases can build up in the soil. To keep pests away from plants, gardeners might consider building a physical barrier using row cover fabric propped up on a frame or hoops. Another concern is when plants that are heavy feeders are grown in the same place every year, they can deplete nutrients in the surrounding soil.

Examples of questions to guide garden planning:

- Did the squash take over everything because it was planted too close to neighboring plants? *Plan to give it more space this year. Squash can also be trained to climb trellises to grow vertically.*
- Was the tomato crop unimpressive because the plants didn't get enough sun? *Dedicate the sunniest spot for these heat-loving tropicals and avoid planting tall things like sunflowers where they might block the sun.*
- What pests or diseases did we identify last year? When did they show up?
- Did the potatoes end up small because they were planted late? Or scabby because they were planted in the same place for several years?

Keeping a garden journal, and making a game plan for the season can help us to learn from our mistakes and grow better every year.

SEEDS TO START IN APRIL

Start Indoors:

- Tomatoes (1st week)
- Broccoli + Cauliflower
- Fennel
- Cabbage + Kohlrabi
- Brussels Sprouts
- Melons

Start Outdoors:

- Arugula
- Carrots
- Peas (mid-month)
- Kale + Collard Greens
- Mustard Greens
- Turnips (mid-month)

Start Outdoors with Protection:

- Lettuce
- Corn Salad
- Pac Choi + Choi Sum
- Radishes
- Spinach

EVENTS

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY MONTHLY MEETING

APRIL 10, 7:30 PM
504 2ND STREET SE

CITY YARD WASTE COLLECTION STARTS

APRIL 10

COMMUNITY GARDEN ORIENTATION

APRIL 23, 1-2 PM
MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC LIBRARY

SEEDY SUNDAY

APRIL 23, 2-4 PM
MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC LIBRARY

PLANT SWAP

APRIL 29, 1:30 PM
MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC LIBRARY

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Have you got a burning garden question? Or a fantastic plant photo that you'd like to share? Want to collaborate on a garden-related project? Let's talk about it! Email questions, photos, and suggestions to cfcagarden@gmail.com.



GROWING GARDENERS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Did you know that there is a free weekly garden club in Medicine Hat? Starting in May, join us in the community garden behind the Root Cellar (440 Maple Ave SE) every Wednesday at 7pm for Growing Gardeners Education Program. Each session covers a different garden-related topic while incorporating hands-on garden learning. Registration is not required and children are welcome so long as they are accompanied by an adult guardian. Watch our social media pages to get updates about topics and information about what to bring (when needed). As we meet outside, adverse weather may force us to cancel or move sessions around. For more information, email CFCAGarden@gmail.com.

MAY GARDEN CLUB TOPICS

<p>MAY 3 GETTING STARTED IN THE GARDEN</p>	<p>What to know before you grow. We will talk about charts, tools and other garden resources in this first meet-up of the season.</p>
<p>MAY 10 SEEDS + TRANSPLANTS</p>	<p>A look at potting mix, moisture, seed treatment, pests, and light. Germination testing. Preparing seedlings for the big move outdoors.</p>
<p>MAY 17 THE LAY OF THE LAND</p>	<p>Learn how existing factors like sun/shade, soil type, and other limitations can help you pick the right plant for the right place.</p>
<p>MAY 24 CONTAINER GARDENING</p>	<p>No garden space? No problem! Growing in containers can be fun, easy and produce delicious food year round.</p>
<p>MAY 31 ALL ABOUT WEEDS</p>	<p>We will look at some common local weeds. How to identify, when to worry, which ones can be eaten and best practices for removal.</p>

GROWING GARDENERS

EDUCATION PROGRAM

FREE TO JOIN



Join us weekly for hands-on edible garden learning. Suitable for new gardeners and experienced green thumbs alike! For more information, contact cfcagarden@gmail.com.

MAY - SEPTEMBER
EVERY WEDNESDAY 7-8:30PM
THE ROOT CELLAR COMMUNITY GARDEN - 440 MAPLE AVE. SE (BEHIND THE BUILDING. ACCESS VIA 5TH STREET SE)



ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION (CFCA)

Community Food Connections Association is non-profit organization based in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Launched in 2003, we have been working to support food security in the community through education, programming, partnerships and policy support for improvements in food, nutrition, health and local agriculture.

Our programs include the Good Food Club, Community Kitchens, the Local Food & Producers Directory, Medicine Hat Community Gardens, and Growing Gardeners Weekly Garden Club. To find out more, head over to our website or social media accounts.



@CFCA_MH